PREFACE

122 THIS book contains some part of the results of anthropological research carried out in the Andaman Islands in the years 1906 to 1908, under the terms of the Anthony Wilkin Studentship in Ethnology of the University of Cambridge. The funds supplied by the studentship were supplemented by grants from the Royal Society and from the government of India. In its original form the monograph was presented as a fellowship thesis at Trinity College. The work of rewriting it was interrupted by absence from England and was only completed in 1914. There has since been a long delay in publication as a result of the war.

127 The book deals with the social institutions of the tribes of the Great Andaman. These had previously been studied by Mr E. H. Man to whose work I have been obliged to make many references in order that my account may be as complete as 114 possible. I should have preferred to devote my attention almost exclusively to the natives of the Little Andaman, about whom very little is known. I found, however, that it was not possible in the time at my disposal to do any satisfactory work amongst these people owing to the difficulty of language. The natives of [97] the Little Andaman know no language but their own, and that is so little related to the languages of the Great Andaman that even a thorough knowledge of the latter is of almost no use in an attempt to learn the former. I spent nearly three months camped with natives of the Little Andaman, giving most of the time to learning their language. No one who has not actually made the attempt to learn the language of a savage people without the help of an interpreter, can form an adequate idea of the difficulties of the task. At the end of three months I found that at the same rate of progress it would take me two or three years to learn to speak the language sufficiently well to begin to

3: Temple G-5 (1901) 1903 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

PREFACE.

First Census Report on the Andamans and Nicobars—Form of Report—The Three Communities in the Islands—Accuracy of the Returns—Printing of Vernacular Words—Bibliography—I of the Andamanse—II of Barren Islands and Narcondam—III of the Nicobar Islands.

922 **First Census Report on Andamans and Nicobars.**—This is the first attempt to make a "Census Report" on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In 1881 and 1891 a Census was taken on the lines of the General Census of India, but only of the Penal Settlement at Port Blair. And so it happens that the General Indian Census of 1901 is also the first occasion on which any formal attempt has been made, under the orders of the Government of India, to take a Census of the Andamanese and Nicobarese outside the Penal Settlement.

000 **Form of Report.**—In making this Report under conditions entirely at variance with those obtaining in India, I have been able, through the courtesy of Mr. H. H. Risley while Census Commissioner for India, to follow a line of my own on an agreement between us as to the general scheme I should adopt. This general scheme is shown in the contents bill of the Report. I think it is also right to say that circumstances have compelled me to compile it against time and in addition to the ordinary duties of my office.

The Three Communities in the Islands.—There are in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands three separate communities having no points of contact as regards the Census with each other and living under conditions belonging to entirely different stages of civilization. The Andamanese consist of tribes of naked savages only recently brought into general contact with civilised races. The Nicobarese are an old far-eastern semi-civilised people with an ancient trade. The Penal Settlement shows all the usual signs of a civilised community of the most advanced type. Each in fact presents separate phenomena with an interest of their own to the student and should be studied separately, and it is for this reason that this Report has been divided into three different parts:—I the Andamanese, II the Nicobarese, III the Penal Settlement of Port Blair. For this reason also it is intended that each part shall be complete in itself from the point of view of a Census Report.

Accuracy of Returns.—While it gives me great pleasure to testify to the scrupulous care and conscientiousness with which Mr. E. H. Man, C.I.E., Major A. R. S. Anderson, I.M.S., and Mr. H. H. D'Oyly carried out the difficult operation of enumerating the Andamanese and Nicobarese, it was impossible for them in the conditions to keep their results clear of the charge of inaccuracy, and circumstances also made it obligatory to conjecture the numbers of the Önge and Jarawa tribes among the Andamanese and of the Shom Pen among the Nicobarese. In this Report I have endeavoured to state fully the reasons for the conjectures and for estimating the amount of error in enumeration: also to point out how a greater approach towards accuracy may possibly be attained at the next opportunity and to what points special attention may then be profitably given.

Printing of Vernacular Words.—In printing this Report diacritical marks on Andamanese and Nicobarese words and names have been everywhere avoided

122 considered. I promised the full collaboration of this Department for undertaking such a survey. It was at first planned to take a fully equipped scientific party for a period of at least six months with headquarters at Port Blair, members of which could pay short visits to the different Islands where the Andamanese tribes were known to have lived. The Ministry of Home Affairs agreed to the proposal and expressed their willingness to place a trawler at our disposal for visiting the outlying islands as no other means of transport existed. Negotiations were taken up for securing the services of Mr Crawley of the B. N. Railway to accompany the party as guide and adviser for he was one of the few who had a direct knowledge of the Jarawa area. With Mr. Duncan of the same Railway, both of whom were landed in the Jarawa territory by British submarines during the last War he spent nearly 6 months in that tract. Although Mr Crawley was very willing to accompany our party it was not found possible in the end to secure his services as the B. N. Railway could not spare him. What is still more unfortunate was that the R. I. N. could not spare any trawler. The prevalence of polio or infantile paralysis in an epidemic form in the Nicobar Islands at the time made it impossible to include them in our itinerary. Lastly, the Chief Commissioner of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands informed us that owing to great demands on residential accommodation at Port Blair it would be difficult for him to find enough living quarters for our party. He suggested that a smaller party might be sent instead, for making exploratory surveys only.

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Accordingly, the original plan had to be modified and a party consisting of myself, Mr S. S. Sarkar, who had then just joined the Department, 3 scientific assistants and 3 attendants left for the Islands on board the 'S. S. Maharaja' on February 17, 1948, reaching Port Blair on the 20th. The Chief Commissioner, Mr S. Majid, I.C.S., met us at the quay and arranged for our stay at the Guest House facing the harbour. He was an exceedingly well-informed and kind gentleman and promised to give us all facilities in our work. We discussed the various questions concerning the Andamanese population and he agreed with me that the most pressing need was to collect correct statistics regarding the strength and distribution of the so-called hostile tribes. For very little can be done now to save the Andamanese proper who have paid for their friendliness by being driven to the verge of extinction and it is now a question of time before they would completely disappear. At the present moment the surviving remnants of this group numbering about 37 have been collected and settled in the Neil and Havelock Islands. In consultation with Mr Majid the plan of making the preliminary reconnaissance was fixed. It was agreed that I, and as many of my party as could be accommodated in the Port Blair harbour launch 'Molly', which Mr Majid by arrangements with the harbour authorities found it possible to place at our disposal for about a week, would leave for Little Andaman to survey the eastern coast of the Island in search of the Onge settlements, as far as this was practicable within this short time. Accordingly we left Port Blair on the 23rd February at 7-30 in the morning on board the motor launch 'Molly'; myself, Messrs S. S. Sarkar, S. Banerjee, R. De and Ramkassia forming the members of our party.

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Mr Subramanian of the Forest Department and Mr Majid's young son also accompanied us. We reached Bumila Creek on the north eastern coast of the Little Andaman at about 3 P.M. and having sighted an Andamanese hut we decided to anchor the launch there. The beach was about 2 miles from the place of anchorage. We took out a small boat and rowed to the beach and reached the hut at about 4 P.M. It was found to be abandoned but there were signs of human occupation and within a few yards a water-hole was discovered. A broken canoe, with a single out-rigger was found close to the hut (*see* Plate I, Fig. 1). Burnt coal and smouldering ashes in the centre of the hut showed that it was probably deserted by the Aborigines as soon as they had sighted us. After making a careful inspection of the place we returned to our launch and decided to anchor there for the night. Unfortunately the choppy sea and the strong current coming from the Bumila Creek tossed our small boat throughout the whole night, as a result of which all of us had an uncomfortable time.

We left southwards towards Hut Bay early in the morning and as we moved along the coast we sighted another Onge hut. This did not seem to be deserted as we saw a few people moving about. We decided to stop there and investigate. We took out a boat and moved towards the coast with such presents as we had brought from Port Blair on the advice of the Chief Commissioner. When we got near the coast, we left the boat and walked for about a furlong through coral beds finally reaching the shore. The hut was found to be circular in shape and not too large, and was occupied by 2 adult females, 1 adult male and a young boy. The adult male, *Ukla*, was the father of the young boy and husband of the younger woman. The older woman was his mother-in-law. These people appeared very friendly. We gave them presents we had brought and took photographs and made drawings of their hut. In addition, full anthropometric measurements were taken by me and blood was taken from fingers for typing by Mr Sarkar. Ukla was able to speak a few Hindi words and we gathered that he had been to Port Blair and knew Mr Bonington, formerly of the Forest Department, Andaman Islands. We found in front of the hut, hanging from a large tree the skull and mandible of a Dugong (*see* Plate I, Figs. 3 & 4). We enquired about its significance from Ukla, but unfortunately his knowledge of Hindi was not sufficient to explain it to us. We learned from him, however, that the name of the village was *Laito*. After making friendly gestures, we returned to 'Molly' and proceeded immediately towards Hut Bay. At about noon time while we were having our lunch, we suddenly saw three outrigger canoes (of single outrigger type) coming towards us, each carrying about 4 Onges. We signalled to them and they came to our launch and tied their canoes with it and came on board. The men appeared to be friendly and not afraid of us. Our greatest difficulty, however, was language, as we could not make ourselves understood as none of the crew or any other member including Mr Subramaniam of the Forest Department knew that language. There was one man who seemed to occupy a position of authority among these men, and was painted with red and yellow ochre on the forehead, arms and breast. The

crew of the ship called him 'Raja' and we adopted this name (*see* Plate IV, Figs. 1 & 2). He was the only one among the Onges who was fully armed with knives, bows and arrows. Among the contents of the canoes, we found complete fishing out-fits, bows and arrows, ropes and nautilous shells, for bailing out water. There was also a kind of bamboo float about 1½ ft. long, probably used for turtle fishing. We gave them food, cigarettes and other presents. After they became quite familiar with us and friendly, they were subjected to full anthropometric measurements by me. Their blood was also tapped by Mr Sarkar for typing. The presents given were iron nails, strips of red cloth, tea and tobacco leaves. Among all these objects what they liked most were the tobacco leaves. Cooked rice, dal (cooked lentils) and fish curry served to them from the launch Mess were however not much appreciated. With the few Hindi words that they were able to understand, we told them that we would like to visit their camp next morning and meet other members of the party. After the canoes had left, we anchored at this point for the night and after taking an early breakfast we left for the shore in two batches. We were informed by the crew that the creek near the Onge camp was called the *Dugong Creek*. We had to wade through brakish water and coast fringing with coral beds for about two miles, before we reached the Onge settlement. There was one large circular communal hut characteristic of the Onges and several lean-to's (*see* Plate I, Fig. 2). We noticed three canoes on the beach apparently those with which they came to meet us on the previous day. We saw also several small dogs and the entrails of a pig strewn round. We met all the 12 Onges we saw the day before, along with Ukla and his family. In addition there were a number of women and children. We took out our presents of dried tobacco leaves, iron nails and two large fishes that we had caught on our way from Port Blair. These were distributed to the Onges. There were altogether 17 men, 15 women, 4 boys and 3 girls. The children were between 1½ to 4 years. The entire party of Onges behaved towards us in a friendly manner and subjected to our measurements and tapping of blood from their fingers without any protest. We went inside their hut and inspected the settlement very thoroughly. A large number of photographs were taken. We found that the name of this village was *Tambebui*. As it became rather late, we decided to return to 'Molly' in the Andamanese canoes, rather than walk through the coral beds for 2 miles. The Onges understood our signs and gladly escorted us back to the launch. We found there were several other Onges waiting for us in the launch who came from the neighbouring village *Gabilong*. All of these Onges appear to be under the influence of the man nick-named as 'Raja' (*see* Plate IV, Figs. 1-2).

We could not proceed towards Hut Bay as the launch had to return for duty at Port Blair, where we reached at about mid-night.

After reaching Port Blair, I discussed the matter of transport with the Chief Commissioner, Mr Majid. A thorough coastal survey of Little Andaman would take at least 15 to 20 days. As it was found impossible to get either from the Forest Department or from the Harbour Master any of their launches

4: Guha E-5 (1948-1949)1953 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Karen AP7

for such a fairly long period, it was decided to give up the idea of continuing our survey of the Little Andaman that year.

At the suggestion of Mr Majid it was finally decided instead to pay a visit to the surviving members of the Friendly Andamanese tribes at Neil and Havelock Islands where they had now been transferred and settled. Unfortunately, as it was March and the closing month of the financial year, I had to return to my headquarters at Banaras and leave Mr Sarkar in charge of the party to carry on further surveys in the North and Middle Andamans as far as this was found possible.

Accordingly Mr Sarkar with his party left Port Blair on 6-3-48 on the Forest Motor Launch "Lindsay" and arrived at Long Island at about 8 A.M. on the following day. Mr Sarkar was met by Mr Joseph, T. S. D. O. who brought "Loka" and his party of four Andamanese. They were studied by him. The party left Long Island on the Forest Launch "Kokhari" at about 7-30 A.M. on the following day. Mr Joseph accompanied the party, who halted at the Guitar Island where some of Loka's associates were hunting turtles with harpoons. After leaving Guitar Island, the launch passed through Homfray Strait. Mr Joseph showed the spot where the Jarawas in 1925 attacked his camp. This is near the place from where the Jarawas usually crossed from the Baratang Island to the Middle Andamans. Proceeding further westwards, Mr Sarkar and his party reached the north-east end of the Spike Island. This is another route of migration of the Jarawas from the South to North Andamans. Usually they come from the South Andaman and cross over to Bluff Island and then reach the Spike Island opposite to it. Loka gave the information that it was about this place that several Jarawas were shot sometime back and their bodies were buried in the Bluff Island. The party went along the coast of Neil Island and anchored off Foul Bay. Human footprints identified by Mr Joseph and Loka as belonging to the Jarawas were found in the sand. Following the footprints the party found the remnants of burnt ashes and cinder in a spot in the jungle. There were also vessels made of leaves for carrying water which were still wet. These were collected as specimens of Jarawa objects for the Department's collections. No traces of Jarawas themselves could however be found who must have moved into the jungles just prior to our party's visit. Our men then crossed over to Bluff Island and searched for the Jarawa skeletons, but none were found. On the 9th of March the "Kokhari" returned to Long Island, where it anchored. Loka brought his party of 21 individuals who were now settled in Neil Island. These people were carefully studied by Mr Sarkar and notes taken regarding their geneology, family structure and physical state, etc. On the 9th the Deputy Chief Commissioner, Mr S. C. Gupta with his wife arrived at Long Island. Mr Sarkar and his party accompanied him to Stewart Sound in his boat "Elsa". Unfortunately the few Andamanese who were living there happened to have gone out in their canoes for fishing and could not be contacted (*see* Plate I, Fig. 5).

They then went with Mr Gupta to the Karen village called *Webi* situated at a short distance from Stewart Sound. There were no Andamanese there,

6: Cipriani E-5 (1951-1953)1961 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onge

Hygiene and Medical Practices among the Onge (Little Andaman)

By Lidio Cipriani

Contents:

Preliminary Note
I. Hygienic Conditions
1. Habitation
2. Clothing and personal care
3. Food
II. Effects on the People's Lives
III. Illnesses and Onge Curative Methods

Preliminary Note

I went to Little Andaman several times, from 1951 onwards, for the sole purpose of studying the Onge. At that time the interior of the island was completely unknown and it was considered dangerous to violate it owing to the hostility of some groups of natives. Some friendly Onge themselves tried to dissuade me from leaving my coastal camp to explore their thick jungle. It was only in 1952 that I succeeded in what proved to be a difficult trip through virgin forest from the east to the west coast of Little Andaman, across its maximum breadth. The enthusiasm of the people accompanying me (fifteen altogether, including some faithful Oraons from the Indian district of Bihar, Burmese policemen and some Onge) enabled us to advance with a speed beyond our hopes. Forest difficulties prevented us from carrying heavy loads. Only the Oraons had some small baggage, which they hung in such a way as to leave both hands free to carve their way through the jungle with a *dah* (long Malayan knife), when necessary. No camping material could be brought, not even beds or tents, beyond the essentials for scientific work and for cooking, which were kept in specially prepared small, water-proof metallic containers. We camped in the forest and marked every camp with the incision of letters, 20 cms high and 5 cms deep, in the bark of gigantic trees, far from the ground, so as to have all the itinerary well indicated. An Oraon who was entrusted with this particular job wrote the meaningful sigla "Anthropos", sometimes also my name, as at Nachugé on the west coast, as well as the date. I did this to facilitate further investigations. All my itineraries in Little Andaman, from 1952 onwards, are marked like this and may be easily found again by the Onge or by my Oraons. Hunting, fishing, collecting wild fruits, edible roots and honey supplied us with food; no vegetarian can live in such a country because, very often, only pork is available there. Of that we had plenty every day, sometimes with nothing else. My men were eager to run and find an acceptable halting place as soon as possible, just to receive cartridges for hunting with me before dark; but we also had

6: Cipriani E-5 (1951-1953)1961 AZ2 Andamans AZ2
Onge

torches for hunting by night. There were pigs everywhere. In half an hour we often got six or more of them. At Chemalê, far from the coast, we had eleven in a few minutes for distribution to everybody, including roaming Onge. Pigeons and ducks also were often plentiful. The simple pleasures of hunting incited everyone to a spontaneous daily struggle through the dense forest; and so, every month, I managed to carry out many times the work I could have done had I not kept all the men glad to follow me. On seven different occasions I spent 162 days in Little Andaman, out of a total of 634 days altogether in the Andamanese Archipelago – all of them given up to Onge research. These trips are recorded in Port Blair Government offices. A few details on the subject are published in the "Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology", Government of India, starting in Vol. II, No. 1, 1953 (issued in 1956) and extended to other issues. Such papers were hurriedly prepared by me while I was halting in Calcutta on my way from the Andamans to Europe. Press proofs could never be submitted to me; there are, consequently, many misprints, particularly in the figures relating to my Onge Census. The misprints are so obvious that they could only influence a most biased critic: to be discussed in future papers and while my Onge book is in preparation. In Port Blair (South Andaman) I started an Onge Museum with material collected by me. I had the honour of inaugurating it on 6 July, 1953 in the presence of the Chief Commissioner for Andamans and Nicobars, Mr. A. K. Ghosh, one of the kindest and most intelligent Indian gentlemen that it was my pleasure to meet in Asia. On 9 March, 1954 Dr. RAJENDRA PRASAD, President of the Republic of India, also visited the Museum. On that occasion I introduced to him 30 of my Onge friends (wives, husbands and children) in their most natural attire. The President questioned me at length on Onge anthropology and ethnology with the pertinence of a specialist.

While in Little Andaman I tried to study all possible aspects of Onge life. I also tried to count the natives: a very difficult task for they are a nomadic people, ready to vanish into the jungle at any moment. Often I was surrounded by them without seeing a single one. In the darkness of their jungle, the small, black, naked Onge easily disappear. They see us but we do not see them. They can only be counted in their sleeping quarters in communal huts; even so, results are misleading. I found a number of communal huts in the interior regions of Little Andaman, whereas previously they were said to exist only on the coast. The larger, more solidly built huts are in the forest. With the help of my Indian assistants I obtained plans and photographs of all the huts that I saw. Unfortunately the number of Onge communal huts is rapidly diminishing – a very significant fact. Many are in ruins, many more completely destroyed. Only kitchen-middens and occasional clusters of planted bamboo indicate their former location. Through an interpreter, and with two Onge speaking a little Hindi, I was able to gather information on these and other matters. Direct observation, however, proved the best way of gaining knowledge. In some places there was nothing to help me, and I was compelled to guess about communal huts whose inmates chose to hide in the jungle. Of the many personal names that I collected I must say that they are reliable only for a short period: the Onge like to change their names from time to time. All this, in addition to the Onge's nomadic way of life, causes great confusion and makes a proper Census almost impossible. Frequent changing of names also hinders the establishment of genealogies. Furthermore, the Onge custom of adopting children shifts many of them from one family to another, and adoptive parents invariably claim them as their own offspring. The parents themselves, who are ignorant of numbers, not infrequently forget how many children they have, who these children are and where they are located. It was almost useless to follow previous information concerning communal huts; and so I decided to consider mainly the situation existing at the time of my visits. The result of my Census may be imperfect, but before criticizing it it would be advisable to know the conditions that prevail in anthropological work among the Onge. Something more than merely counting people, anyhow, was achieved by me in Little Andaman.

In this short paper I am pleased to present a peculiar aspect of Onge life, an aspect that these innocent and once hostile people did not attempt to hide from me, though they also told me nothing about it. Only direct observation could help, and it involved pro-

fieldwork among the Ongi is the language problem. Dr. DATTA-MAJUMDER writes: 114 124

"It should be noted that very little information about the social organization of the Onge has been gathered so far on account of the barrier of language. Not a single interpreter knowing Onge language is available. We came across only two Onge men who knew just a few words of Hindi as a result of their occasional visits to Port Blair".

This was confirmed by Professor CIPRIANI who, in his letter, also mentions the two Ongi who know a little Hindi and adds: "No real Ongi interpreter is, as yet, available". RADCLIFFE-BROWN's experience had been similar. He found only two Ongi men who knew about 20 words of Hindustani.

PORTMAN seems to have been more fortunate in 1886—87. He mentions having had Ongi interpreters. These may have been members of a group of eleven persons who had been captured in the Cinque Islands, between Great and Little Andaman, in 1885 and who had been brought to Port Blair. It would be of great help for anthropological research if a few Ongi could be induced to stay some time in Port Blair and to learn either Hindi or English. In any case, however, an anthropologist wishing to do serious work on Little Andaman will have to remain long enough on the island to acquire sufficient knowledge of the language. He could prepare himself in advance for this task through a thorough study of the available literature on the Great Andaman languages (MAN, PORTMAN, TEMPLE, BASU). Although the languages are different, they are related, and their structure is probably more or less similar. For the Ongi language itself, we have only RADCLIFFE-BROWN's "Notes on the Languages of the Andaman Islands", the list of Ongi words in PORTMAN's "Manual of the Andamanese Languages" (1887) — which RADCLIFFE-BROWN found "of no service whatever" — and a vocabulary of the Ongi language, compiled by M. C. C. BONIG in 1903 and published in Port Blair. 114 122 197

M. C. C. BONIG, (Vocabulary of the Onge Language, exact title not available), Port Blair, 1903. 113

Census of India, 1901, Vol. III, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by R. C. TEMPLE, pp. 91—95 (PORTMAN's report), 117—120 (language).

Census of India, 1911, Vol. II, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by R. F. LOWIS, pp. 6, 27—29, 81—82, 88.

Census of India, 1931, Vol. II, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by R. F. LOWIS, pp. 2—5, 14—15.

Census of India, 1931, Vol. II, *The Andaman and Nicobar Islands*, by M. C. C. BONINGTON, pp. 8—11, 16—19, 22.

10: Sen K-3, 4 (ca. 1955) 1962 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

[Introductory, P. iV]
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PREFACE

The dearth of literature but considerable curiosity about the islands because of the presence of the aborigines, the development of the penal colony and in recent years the colonisation of the refugees, have inspired the author to write a geographical treatise of these islands covering almost all their physical and socio-economic aspects. The interest of the author about these islands of course dates back to some 8 or 9 years for preparing a thesis about these islands as a part fulfilment of his M. Sc. course and the author with the limited time and money made some personal enquiries for the collection of data and the assessment of the situation. The access to the data and the other research materials and the visits to the different parts of the islands were possible through the kind permission and help of the-then Chief Commissioner Sri S. N. Maitra, the Forest Officers, the Head Master of Port Blair High School. Dr. L. Cipriani besides a host of other officers and friends in the islands and also at Calcutta. However the ultimate preparation of the thesis became possible for the kind guidance of Dr. S. P. Chatterjee, Head of the Dept of Geography, Calcutta University.

Anybody faces a tremendous problem in conducting a thorough survey of the islands arising out of the poor communication facilities both on land and water, and more so on account of the very few literatures on the islands. The author cannot demand a thorough enquiry in all parts of the islands and his analysis of the different aspects has been derived more from the conclusions of sample survey.

Though a long time has elapsed since the preparation of the thesis in the year 1955, the author has been, on the whole, eager to incorporate all the latest informations of the islands. The present book is partially a reproduction of his previous thesis with some additional facts and informations and the objective of such changes has been to prepare a comprehensive geographical treatise rather than focussing one particular aspect as was done in the thesis i.e. the colonisation problems of the islands. Besides this, additional chapters on the aboriginal population, the overall assessment and also a geographical account on the Nicobar Islands have been added. The Nicobar Islands, though form only a sidelight of the book, also command a separate geographical treat-

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

Foreword

The following pages represent a brief account of my observations during a period of nearly two years which I spent in the Andaman Islands, living for part of the time with the Onges, who provide the major part of my material.

I had for a long time been interested in the vexed question of the origins of the pygmies, and after spending some years studying them in Africa and in Asia I came to the conclusion that the peoples of the Andaman archipelago might well represent the 'purest' living example of Negrito stock and culture, remaining as they have in complete isolation until very recently. After a brief visit to the Islands in 1951, therefore, and with the warm co-operation of all the officials and government departments concerned, I was able, beginning in 1952, to spend a total of 634 days in the Islands, 162 of them living in the forests of Little Andaman with the Onges.

It would be impossible to list individually the Indian government officials who aided me in every way, but I wish to record here my deepest appreciation of the courtesy and help extended to me by all the departments and individuals with whom I had dealings, both in the Andamans and in India itself. To all of them, whatever their rank or station, are due my warmest thanks – without their help these notes, incomplete as they are, could never have been written.

Armed with gifts of mirrors, glass beads, cloth and, above all, tobacco, I was able to make friends with the reputedly ferocious people of the Andamans and to make observations which, though but a beginning, will I hope lead others to carry further the work which I was able to begin. During my visits to the Islands I was able to set up a museum at Port Blair, where I hope ultimately to

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Onges

colonel who had accompanied him. After a series of similar incidents involving other people Portman went to Bumila Creek on 10 November 1891, for revenge. A number of Onges, including the one responsible for wounding the colonel, were captured and taken to Port Blair.

Other visits by various people followed, always very brief and always limited to the coast, but there were no landings of note. Various expeditions visited the coast of the island for a few days and even made contact with some of the Onges, but the interior of the island remained as unknown as before. In February 1951 I accompanied one of these expeditions, which again did not go beyond the coast. Those five days on Little Andaman were most revealing, and enabled me to plan the landing I subsequently made in 1952. I saw that the island was teeming with game, that wild fruit and edible roots were plentiful, and that the sea round the island was full of fish, lobsters, huge crabs and turtles. Moreover, the turtles laid eggs in the sand where it was very easy to find them by following the beasts' tracks. I realized that it would be unnecessary to bring in provisions, and that it would be possible to enter the forest unencumbered with anything more than guns, cartridges and a few cooking utensils. Every day during this short stay I went with a police escort as far as possible into the forest in order to reconnoitre. In some places I noticed recent traces of small bare feet, but no Onges appeared.

Realizing that mobility was essential for any expedition into the interior of the island, I prepared at Port Blair a number of small watertight metal boxes to hang from the shoulder, to take a minimum of necessities. The largest items in my own personal baggage were a mosquito-net, a very light hammock and note-books. Cartridges were to be divided among the boxes. Tents, camp-beds and other large equipment would have to be left in a base camp, which would be established on the coast and left under police guard with radio transmission apparatus for communication with Port Blair. If necessary, a portable radio could follow us.

Several factors made me want to return. There was the mystery of the unknown interior of the island. There was the prevailing lack of information of any kind about the Onges, even of their numbers. I wanted too to carry out an investigation of their somatic characteristics, using the greatest possible number of individuals.

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Onges

After submitting my programme for the approval of the various Indian authorities, I finally left Calcutta in the motor vessel *Maharaja* and arrived in Port Blair on the evening of 11 December 1951. 122

Once arrived on Great Andaman I began to make preparations, but for some time the sea remained so rough that the crossing to Little Andaman was impossible. In order not to lose time, I went as far as Middle Andaman, where I started excavating an ancient kitchen-midden left by a group which has now disappeared.[1] Eventually, in March 1952, there began for me what was to become a fascinating if dangerous adventure, which continued for several years, in the dry seasons, and which I hope will prove to have been of some value. 114

Even now we know little of the anthropology of the Onges. They are Negritos, and therefore people of small stature. They are not, however, as small as the African pygmies, or Negrillos, who are the tiniest people in the world and who are in many respects very different from the Asiatic Negritos. Among the latter, individuals of over 4 feet are giants, while the normal height is substantially less. 142

In their somatic and cultural characteristics the Andamanese differ from all Asiatics, including their closest connections the Semang of the Malaccan peninsula and the Aetà of the Philippines. There is however some similarity between the three groups, indicating a distinctive common ancestry. The Negritos of today constitute the sole and fragmentary remains of a people who in ancient times were spread over a large part of Asia, and there is no lack of evidence to support their former presence much farther east and south, well into Oceania. 144

The word Negrito means 'small negro', but the name is inappropriate. It was originally given to these people because of the colour of their skin and the woolly texture of their hair. In their bodily proportions, however, as well as in the morphology of the head as a whole, and in particular the structure of the mouth, they resemble the Negroes considerably less than do African pygmies, who are in their turn quite a distinct type. The Negritos have some superficial affinity to peoples of small stature in New Guinea and Melanesia, such as the Tapiro, the Cameveca, the Cai and the Pesechem (or

[1] See page 69.

11: Cipriani E-3 (1951-1955) 1966 AZ2 Andamans AZ2

ground. Two parallel transverse poles of equal length, one front and one back, complete the frame, which is lashed together with the usual rush fibres. The roof consists of fresh *Pandanus* leaves, palms, or grass. It never actually touches the ground, and food refuse is thrown out from underneath it in the usual way, covering the ground round the shelter.

The bed takes a little longer than the roof to put up, as a number of sticks have to be gathered to make the compact platform, raised about half a metre from the ground on four stout props driven into the ground, one at each corner, and a suitable trunk has to be found for the head-rest. Normally one bed takes an entire family – mother, father, children and dogs, all well packed on the platform with the inevitable fire beside. On rare occasions, when the shelter is intended purely for the menfolk on a hunting expedition, only one bed is prepared, but generally every hunter has his family with him. I have myself slept like this with the Onges on trips where the forest was too dense for any baggage to be carried.

As the kitchen-middens show (see p. 68), their permanent huts are, with very few exceptions, circular and are still extremely simple. The essential feature is the waterproof roof-mats, well overlapped, which form the enormous umbrella roof. From the outside the whole thing looks in danger of collapsing, but from the interior it is obviously safely held by a frame of poles, lashed with innumerable ties to stout uprights fixed firmly into the ground. No central pillar is needed, and when there is one it is only by chance; I saw very few on Little Andaman. There are no divisions into rooms or compartments – everything is open to the eyes of all the occupants of the beds. Most of these are arranged as the radii of a circle, fairly near the outer edge of the hut, the roof coming down so close to the ground that everyone sleeps with their heads towards the centre, but there may be some beds across the centre space.

At the circumference the roof is only thirty to forty centimetres from the ground, the roofing mats being well lashed on to uprights in case of high winds, and one can wriggle in and out of the hut on one's stomach, crawling over the refuse thrown out through the convenient gap. There is always, however, a 'proper' entrance, where one edge of the roof-wall can be lifted up. At the top of the roof, on the lee side, one section can be propped open on poles,